



## The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif in the Johannine Redaction

David J. Hawkin

Volume 33, numéro 2, 1977

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/705606ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/705606ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Hawkin, D. J. (1977). The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif in the Johannine Redaction. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 33(2), 135–150. <https://doi.org/10.7202/705606ar>

# THE FUNCTION OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE MOTIF IN THE JOHANNINE REDACTION

David J. HAWKIN

**T**his paper will attempt to go beyond the purely historical studies of the figure of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel. Such efforts have usually attempted to identify him with a historical figure in early Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The thrust of the present study will be to relate the function of the Beloved Disciple motif to the debate on John which has been initiated by Ernst Käsemann. Käsemann sought to

1. The traditional view is that he was John the son of Zebedee. Irenaeus and Polycrates make this identification (EUSEBIUS, *Ecc. Hist.*, V, 8, 4; v, 24, 3). For further second century witnesses, see J. COLSON, *L'énigme du Disciple que Jésus aimait* (Théologie Historique 10; Paris: Beauchesne, 1969), pp. 29-63. The most impressive argument for this identification is still in B. F. WESCOTT, *The Gospel According to St. John* (rev. ed., 1908), pp. xxi-xxv. Others who make this identification include: J. D. MICHAELIS, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: F. & C. RIVINGTON, 1802), III, p. 318; W. SANDAY, *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 252; F. -M. BRAUN, *Jean le Théologien et Son évangile dans l'Église ancienne*, Vol. I, (Paris: Gabalda, 1959), pp. 396 f.; R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John* (i-xii), (Anchor Bible 29; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. xcvi ff.; D. GUTHRIE, *New Testament Introduction: The Gospels and Acts* (London: Tyndale, 1965), p. 224; H. RIGG, "Was Lazarus 'the Beloved Disciple'?", *ET* 33 (1921-1922), 232-234; D. G. ROGERS, "Who was the Beloved Disciple?", *ET* 77 (1966), 214. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. I, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 97-104, cautiously identified the Beloved Disciple with John, but has subsequently changed his mind—see "On the Origin of the Fourth Gospel", in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, Vol. I, (Pittsburgh: Prespective, 1970), pp. 223-246, and "Der Jünger, den Jesus Liebt", in *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Vorarbeiten*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag; Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1970, Heft 2, ed. J. Gnilka, et. al.), pp. 97-117. The traditional evidence in favour of the identification is in fact very suspect (see W. G. KÜMMEL, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 165-174). Moreover, many arguments adduced in favour of the identification centre around a comparison with the Synoptics, which does raise certain difficult hermeneutical questions. That is, it seems incumbent upon any commentator who wishes to adduce parallels to first explain precisely how he sees the relationship between John and the Synoptics—for if they both conceive of history in a different way, or have different historical concerns, comparisons can be (at the very least) misleading, and possibly even invalid. For example, R. E. BROWN, *John*, pp. lxxxvii-cii, accepts that "John's historical tradition is somewhat of a challenge to the general tradition shared by the Synoptics," and wishes to further argue that the authority behind the Gospel (to be identified with the Beloved Disciple) is thus more likely to be a real authority in the Church—"a man of status not unlike Peter's"—i.e., John the son of Zebedee. However, he also relies heavily on arguments which can only be substantiated by a comparison with the Synoptics. He thinks that the Beloved Disciple must be identified with one of the Twelve (because of his presence at the Last Supper); that he is probably one of

contribute to the larger question of orthodoxy and heresy in earliest Christianity<sup>2</sup> by focusing particularly on the Fourth Gospel.<sup>3</sup> The present study attempts to contribute to this debate by focusing on the significance of the Beloved Disciple in the Johannine redaction as an authenticator and guarantor of tradition.

Through our study of the Beloved Disciple we hope to determine the kinds of responses the Fourth Evangelist wished to inculcate in and elicit from his readership, and relate these aims to contemporary concerns. Although this aspect of our critical task must be distinguished from examining the relationships within the story-line, we should be aware that the two sets of relations are themselves related, for there is the question of how the author wishes the readers to identify with the groups and characters within the story-line. That is, the redactional story-line is functional to religious purposes.<sup>4</sup>

The attempt, then, is to determine from the Johannine redaction the responses the author wishes to inculcate in and elicit from his readership, and relate these aims to contemporary concerns<sup>5</sup> in an effort to see whether these concerns

---

the "inner three" who in the Synoptics are closest to Jesus; moreover, in the Synoptics John often appears with Peter and in Acts Peter and John are companions in Jerusalem (Acts 3-4) and on the mission to Samaria (8:14), a fact of significance when one notes a Samaritan mission in the Fourth Gospel. But in the Fourth Gospel *itself* there is no mention of an "inner three", and it is not stated that only the Twelve were at the Last Supper. Indeed, the evidence of the Gospel itself militates against the identification of John the son of Zebedee with the Beloved Disciple—see P. PARKER, "John the Son of Zebedee and the Fourth Gospel", *JBL* 81 (1962), 33-43.

The Beloved Disciple has been identified with Lazarus by R. EISLER, *The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel*, (London: Methuen, 1938); J. N. SANDERS, "Those whom Jesus loved (John XI, 5)", *NTS* (1954-1955), 29-41; *Idem*, "Who was the Disciple whom Jesus loved?", in *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowkay, 1957), pp. 72-82; F. V. FILSON "Who was the Beloved Disciple?", *JBL* 68 (1949), 83-88; K. A. ECKHARDT, *Der Tod des Johannes als Schlüssel zum Verständnis der johanneischen Schriften* (Studien zur Rechts- und Religionsgeschichte 3; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961). Eckhardt also wishes to identify Lazarus with John the son of Zebedee.

Others wish to identify the Beloved Disciple with John Mark: L. JOHNSON, "Who was the Beloved Disciple?", *ET* 77 (1966), 157-158; responded to by J. R. PORTER, "Who was the Beloved Disciple?", *ET* 77 (1966), 213-214 and D. G. RODGERS, "Who was the Beloved Disciple?", *ET* 77 (1966), 214; JOHNSON replied in *ET* 77 (1966), 380.

There have been yet other suggestions. E. L. TITUS, "The Identity of the Beloved Disciple", *JBL* 69 (1950), 323-328, argues for Matthias. B. W. BACON, *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), pp. 301-331, thinks he is Paul. Lindars, *John*, p. 33, regards this particular suggestion as "grotesque", although Bultmann, *John*, p. 484, n. 5, who still regards the suggestion as "impossible" is more sympathetic: "... if one had to posit an actual historical figure who represented [this] free Christendom for the Evangelist, Bacon's view that Paul is intended is best as regards the subject matter".

2. See especially W. BAUER, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, (London: S.C.M., 1972) and the literature cited in the second appendix.
3. E. KÄSEMANN, "Ketzler und Zeuge. Zum johanneischen Verfasser Problem," *ZTK* 48 (1951) 292-311; *Idem*, *The Testament of Jesus*, (London: S.C.M., 1968); see also S.S. SMALLEY, "Diversity and Development in John", *NTS* 17 (1970-71) 276-292.
4. See my article, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction", *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 491f.
5. The search for a discernible contemporary horizon within the redaction of John is of singular importance; see R. SCHNACKENBURG, "Zur Herkunft des Johannesevangelium," *BZ* 14 (1970) 1-23; *Idem*, "Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte," *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament: Vorarbeiten*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag; Einsiedeln: Benziger), Heft 2, ed. J. Gnifka et. al. (1970), pp. 97-117.

shed any light on the orthodoxy/heresy debate. Our strategy of inquiry will take account of the hermeneutical circle, according to which the whole is intelligible in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole. Although logically a circular method, the circle is broken open by acts of insight.

What can be observed about the structure of the Fourth Gospel—that is, what observations can be made about the *whole*?<sup>6</sup>

Among scholars who have not concerned themselves with displacement theories commentators have tended to agree that the structure of John is “simple in outline, complicated in detail.”<sup>7</sup> One of the more notable attempts at a really detailed analysis of the Johannine redaction is that of Deeks.<sup>8</sup> However, most scholars do not attempt to press the structure into such rigorous moulds.

It is generally agreed that the Gospel divides into two parts, the division coming after 12:50.<sup>9</sup> It is often further argued that the author of the Gospel himself indicates (cf. 2:11 and 12:37) that the main body of the text up to the end of Chapter 12 falls under the general heading of Jesus’ “signs” and what follows falls under the heading of Jesus’ “hour” (cf. 13:1).<sup>10</sup> Dodd, for instance, divides the Gospel into two (as above) and further divides the book of signs into seven episodes.<sup>11</sup>

The structure of John is further defined by liturgical chronology: many events gravitate around the various feasts mentioned in the text. This gives the text a theological density through the meaning the feasts carried in Judaism and the new meanings which the person and work of Jesus give the Johannine text. It has been suggested that the liturgical chronology of the Gospel is the key to its structure.<sup>12</sup>

However, for our particular purposes it seems unnecessary to haggle over the details of the Johannine structure, for—as we have noted—there is general agreement that the Gospel is divided into two parts (1:1-12:50 and 13:1-20:31).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it is seldom contested that the second half of the Gospel is divided into four parts:

- |                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Jesus’ discourse to “His own” | 13:1-17:26 |
| 2. The Passion                   | 18:1-19:42 |

6. Throughout this study we have made no attempt to rearrange the text of John in an attempt to find a “better” order. We have followed the lead of such as Dodd and Barrett in treating the Gospel as it stands.

7. C. K. BARRETT, *The Gospel according to St. John*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), p. 11. He divides the Gospel into four parts and an appendix: (a) 1:1-18 Prologue (b) 1:19-12:50 Narratives, Conversations and Discourses (c) 13:1-17:26 Jesus alone with his disciples (d) 18:1-20:31 The Passion and Resurrection (e) 21:1-25 an Appendix.

8. D. DEEKS, “The Structure of the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 15 (1968) 107-129.

9. So among the major commentators, Barrett, Brown and Schnackenburg.

10. BROWN, *John*, *op. cit.* xiii-xxi, terms the second part of the Gospel “the Book of Glory.”

11. C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1963), part III.

12. See esp. A. GUILDING, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960).

13. See, however, G. JOHNSON, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1970).

3. The Ressurrection	20:1-29
(Conclusion	20:30f.)
4. Postscript	21:1-25

Let us build on these established insights. Our particular concern is the orthodoxy/heresy question within the early Church. That is, we must seek to discover within the total redaction where the author might focus attention on our particular question. It follows that Jesus' address to "His own" —that is, those with whom the Johannine community would identify<sup>14</sup>—is more likely to shed light on an inner Church conflict such as the orthodoxy/heresy issue.<sup>15</sup> And what emerges from chapters 13-17 is that they are explanatory to the Passion narrative which follows them.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in these chapters, there is no particular focusing on "the Twelve"; clearly the disciples present at the Last Supper represent the *idloi* generally. "It is the community in which Jesus stands at the moment, which he addresses, and for which he prays . . ." <sup>17</sup>

The Passion of Jesus (18:1-19:42) divides into the following sections:

Prologue	18:1-12
Act One	18:13-27
Act Two	18:28-19:16
Act Three	19:17-37
Epilogue	19:38-42

The "Prologue" (the capture of Jesus) and the "Epilogue" (the burial) are linked in as much as they are garden scenes. Act one is the interrogation of Jesus by Annas with all the historical problems that raises.<sup>18</sup> This anecdotal narrative is framed by the denials of Peter.

Act two is set at Pilate's praetorium. There are seven scenes:<sup>19</sup>

Scene 1 18:28-32	(outside the praetorium)
Scene 2 18:33-38a	(inside)
Scene 3 18:38b-40	(outside)
Scene 4 19:1-3	(inside)

14. See below pp. 146ff.

15. See, for example, K. GRAYSTON, "Jesus and the Church in St. John's Gospel," *LondQuartHol-Rev* 36 (1967) 106-115, in which he emphasizes that chapters 13-17 are fixed on problems within the group, in contrast to the first half of the Gospel. H. RIESENFELD, "Zu den johanneischen *hina*-Sätzen," *StudTheol* 19 (1965) 213-220 seeks to show that John has its *Sitz im Leben* in the life of the community by an analysis of the *hina* sentences. The purpose of John is Christian instruction and clarification of the faith.

16. Space precludes a detailed analysis of the Last Discourse in this study. For an excellent analysis see R. E. BROWN, *John*, *op. cit.*, 581-782.

17. R. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), p. 459.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 643 n. 3.

19. Brown, *John*, *op. cit.*, p. 858.

Scene 5 19:4-8	(outside)
Scene 6 19:9-11	(inside)
Scene 7 19:12-16	(outside)

Why do the scenes alternate between outside and inside the praetorium? The answer is presented in an ironic way in scene 1:<sup>20</sup> Jewish officialdom's fear of defilement. Act two is, in fact, charged throughout with dramatic irony gravitating around the kingship of Jesus theme and his rejection by the Jews, as evidenced by the central scene 19:1-3. Act three similarly continues this theme.

In Act three we are presented with five tableaux:

- Scene 1 19:17-22
- Scene 2 19:23-24
- Scene 3 19:25-27
- Scene 4 19:28-30
- Scene 5 19:31-37

The first scene has the ironic witness of the pagan to the kingship of Jesus. Jesus is "guilty" of being the messiah, King of Israel. Scene two demonstrates the fulfilment of the book of psalms. But further to this, the reference to the seamless robe (exclusively Johannine) is probably intended to present Jesus as both King and Priest.<sup>21</sup> Scene three—the central one—features the Beloved Disciple and we shall examine this in more detail a little later. In scene four the work of Jesus is depicted as now finished. He dies having fulfilled another scripture. Moreover, the mention of the hyssop branch recalls a detail of the Passover liturgy. The intention of scene five is quite clearly conveyed in the comment of the redactor in v. 34.<sup>22</sup>

John's presentation of the Passion of Jesus gives us valuable insight into the intention of the Evangelist. In terms of our particular inquiry, especially noteworthy is the fact that just as scene four is the centrepiece of Act two, so also is scene three—featuring the appearance of the Beloved Disciple—is the centrepiece of Act three.

20. Only John indicates why Pilate had to adjudicate at the trial at all: see B. F. MEYER, *The Man for Others*, (New York: Bruce, 1970), p. 117f.

21. See BROWN, *John*, op. cit., p. 920f.

22. R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1965), p. 91f.: "In his life Jesus had spoken of the water of life that he would give; he had said of himself: 'From within him there shall flow rivers of living water' (Jn 7:38). Now that he is glorified, raised up on the cross, the water that flows from within him, permeated with the blood of his sacrifice, is truly the water of life bringing salvation to men . . . Pressing on, John sees two Old Testament citations fulfilled in the piercing of Jesus. The text on not breaking a bone is again from the ritual of the *paschal lamb* . . . The second citation, referring in the Old Testament to Israel's rejection of God, promises in its original context the pouring forth of God's spirit and the opening of a fountain of cleansing for Jerusalem." For a quite different interpretation see G. RICHTER, "Blut und Wasser aus der durchbohrten Seite Jesu (Joh. 19, 34b)," *MunchTheolZeit* 21 (1970) 1-21.

The Resurrection appearances in John divide clearly into two scenes, each comprising two episodes.<sup>23</sup> In each of the scenes the first episode is concerned with appearances to disciples and the second to individuals (Mary and Thomas respectively). In the latter case, however, the faith of the individual is related to a wider audience.

Even though our comments on the structures of the latter half of the Fourth Gospel have been brief, one fact does emerge very clearly: The Evangelist has constructed his work carefully. Our task now is to discover the author's purposes in so constructing his work. In accord with the strategy of inquiry specified at the beginning of our study, we will now focus our attention on those parts of the redaction which feature the Beloved Disciple. Our examination so far indicates that although he only appears three times (excluding the postscript) the *placement* of the incidents which feature him give him central significance. That is, he appears at the beginning of the discourse of Jesus to "His own" (13:23), in the Passion narrative (19:26—on the placement of this see above) and in the Resurrection narrative (20:2). He thus appears at crucial points in all three major sections.

We have noted earlier that attempts to identify the Beloved Disciple with a particular historical figure must be regarded as having been unsuccessful.<sup>24</sup> But this does not imply that we regard him as a symbolic figure.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, we

23. BROWN, *John*, *op. cit.*, p. 995f.

24. We have already pointed out the difficulties of identifying the Beloved Disciple with John the son of Zebedee (above, n. 1). The identification of the Beloved Disciple with Lazarus begins with the assumption that somewhere the Evangelist would indicate the identity of the Beloved Disciple. Given this premise, Lazarus becomes the most likely candidate in view of the fact that the Gospel does state that Jesus "loved" Lazarus (11:5). However, this argument *still* leaves the difficulty of why the Beloved Disciple is not named in chs. 13, 19 and 20. (The particular argument that 11:1-44 and 12:9-11 were added later to the work at a time when the Evangelist had decided to abandon the anonymity of the disciple is no answer, for it fails to take into account that his identity is still concealed in the postscript.) The proponents of this view have the merit of seeking a solution based on the text itself. However, what they seem unable to accept is the fact that the Evangelist simply does not tell us (for whatever reason) who the Beloved Disciple is. The argument that the Beloved Disciple is John Mark rests on very slender external evidence and unfortunately has no basis in the text. The idea that he is Titus or Paul need not even be considered.

25. Bultmann asserts that there is no accounting for the fact that the Beloved Disciple is never spoken of by name unless he is a symbolic figure. He thinks we must begin with John 19:26 f.: "If the scene has symbolic significance, which can scarcely be doubted, it can only be that the mother, professing loyalty to the crucified, and remaining at the cross to the end, stands for Jewish Christendom. And the Beloved Disciple therefore represents Gentile Christendom,—not of course with regard to its ethnic character, but insofar as it is the authentic Christendom which has achieved its own true self-understanding. The self-awareness of this Christendom, emancipated from the ties of Judaism, shows itself in the two scenes 13.21-30 and 20.2-10, where the Beloved Disciple appears beside Peter, the representative of Jewish Christendom. It is he and not Peter who reclines in Jesus' bosom, and can mediate Jesus' thought. And the relation between Jewish and Gentile Christendom is portrayed in a characteristic fashion in 20.2-10, where each in his own way, by using the term in two senses, can claim to be "in front of" the other" (*John*, p. 484). Bultmann leaves out of account in such an interpretation 19:35 and chapter 21, because he regards the former as a redactional gloss and the latter as a redactional appendix. (He freely concedes the point that in chapter 21 "the term beloved disciple stands for a particular historical figure, clearly an authoritative one for the circle which edits the Gospel and one whose authority is placed side by side with that of Peter"—*ibid.*, p. 483.)

regard such interpretations as wrong.<sup>26</sup> We take the view that he is an historical figure with paradigmatic significance.<sup>27</sup> But in any case, our avowed task is to focus specifically on the *function* of the Beloved Disciple in the redaction. Accordingly, we must now delimit and examine the texts which refer to him.

If, for the moment, we exclude the postscript, the Beloved Disciple is explicitly named in three places: 13:23, 19:26 and 20:2. It seems no accident that he appears for the first time in 13:23-26. In our examination of the outline of the whole Gospel we noted that chapters 13-17 are discourses of Jesus to "His own".

---

Käsemann proffers the following opinion in "Ketzer und Zeuge", p. 180: "If, together with the whole of critical research [*sic!*], one rejects the historicity of this figure, seeing in him rather the embodiment of the ideal witness, one may even more precisely designate him as a projection of the author and his community into the Gospel history".

However, the most thorough-going and detailed argument for the interpretation of the Beloved Disciple as symbolic figure is offered by A. KRAGERUD, *Der Lieblingsjünger im Johannevangelium* (Oslo: Osloer Universitets Verlag; Hamburg: Grossohaus Wegner, 1959). In his work, Kragerud considers that besides the three places in the Fourth Gospel where the Beloved Disciple is explicitly mentioned (13:23, 19:26 and 20:2), two other passages refer to him: 18:18 f. and 1:35-40; (he also of course appears in 21:1-14, 15-23). Kragerud considers the material in these passages as freely invented and cannot be understood unless the Beloved Disciple is a symbolic figure. He considers it self-evident that the Beloved Disciple is of great significance in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, and finds the key to such interpretation in this disciple's relationship to Peter. Accordingly, he devotes much of his work to examining the meaning of the Beloved Disciple and Peter *Gestalten*. The Beloved Disciple represents a Christian "pneumatic" circle: "So ist L als der Representant eines kirchlichen Dienstes, und zwar eines 'pneumatischen' aufzufassen" (p. 82). Peter represents the ecclesiastical office, but the rivalry represented by Peter and the Beloved Disciple is not a matter of teaching but of practice. That is, the apostolic itinerant prophets represented by the Beloved Disciple considered themselves to be the "intellectual" leaders of the communities and conceded their authority to ecclesiastical office holders in "external matters".

This monograph does have the merit of seeking to locate the historical horizon of the Johannine community. (In particular, it is worth noting that he seeks to relate the Johannine community to the Johannine letters, and often concurs with Käsemann, e.g., "Dass Diotrefes kein anderer als eine Amtsperson in der Gemeinde sein kann, sollte eigentlich selbstverständlich sein", p. 107). However, the monograph is open to rather serious difficulties. In particular, not only does he have difficulty with his exegesis of 1:35-42 (see A. DAUER, "Das Wort des Gekreuzigten an seine Mutter und 'der Jünger, den er liebte'", *BZ* 12 (1968), p. 89), but his collective interpretation of 21:24 is untenable (see R. SCHNACKENBURG's review of the book in *BZ* 4 (1960), 302-307, esp. 304 f.).

26. One difficulty with purely symbolic interpretations is that they fail to come to terms with the fact that the figures with whom the Beloved Disciple is associated—Peter, Mary and Jesus himself—are historical (even if a symbolic dimension be attributed to them). It seems to be somewhat incoherent to propose an interpretation in which a *purely* symbolic figure is juxtaposed with historical ones.
27. This is also the position of the following scholars: T. LORENZEN, *Der Lieblingsjünger im Johannevangelium* (Stuttgarter Bibel Studien 55; Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1971), who says: "For it ought not to be maintained that the Beloved Disciple is no more than an historical figure (*Gestalt*). Certainly he also has ideal and symbolic traits, but just these traits reflect his important position in the history of the Johannine community, his significant role for the typically Johannine theology, and also the theological situation of the community itself" (pp. 80 f.—translation my own). R. SCHNACKENBURG, "On the Origin of the Fourth Gospel", p. 234: "I would say, therefore, that we must settle the controversy in favour of a historical person, but without depriving him of paradigmatic significance". BROWN, *John*, p. xcvi: "That the BD has a figurative dimension is patent. In many ways he is the exemplary Christian, for in the NT 'beloved' is a form of address for fellow Christians. Yet this symbolic dimension does not mean that the BD is nothing but a symbol". W. GRUNDMANN, *Zeugnis und Gestalt des Johannevangeliums. Eine*



Plainly, the readers of the Gospel are meant to identify with the group at the Last Supper, for they are the representatives of the Church.<sup>28</sup> The scene itself can hardly be maintained to be historical—rather it is an “ideal scene”<sup>29</sup> freely created by the Evangelist.<sup>30</sup>

The text of 13:23 reads:

ἦν ἀνακείμενος εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς.

Now it is certainly no accident that the first reference to the Beloved Disciple refers to him as “lying close to the breast of Jesus”. Many commentators have gone to great pains to discover who was sitting where and how it was possible for the Beloved Disciple to be “lying close to the breast of Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> But the primary purpose of the phrase is surely to evoke a comparison with 1:18: *μονογενὴς θεὸς ὃς ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο*. That is, just as Jesus has a special relationship with the Father, so the Beloved Disciple has a special relationship with Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

This special relationship is illustrated by means of the story of the betrayer. After Jesus says that one of his disciples will betray him, Simon Peter “beckons”<sup>33</sup> to the Beloved Disciple to ask Jesus who the betrayer is. The identity of the traitor is then revealed to the Beloved Disciple by Jesus.

---

*Studie zur denkerischen und gestalterischen Leistung des vierten Evangelisten* (Arbeiten zur Theologie 7; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1961), pp. 71 f.: “He is the bearer of revelation and as such a witness and characterization of the historicity of Jesus; he has his position in a charismatic group of the last phase of early Christianity. The Son is the revealer of the Father, the Beloved Disciple of the Son . . . The Beloved Disciple is both individual and type; he dies as individual, he lives on as type”. M. DIBELIUS seems to equivocate: in “John 15, 13: Eine Studie zum Traditionsproblem des Johannesevangeliums”, in *Festgabe für Adolf Deismann zum 60. Geburtstag 7. November 1926* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1927), p. 180, he sees the Beloved Disciple as “the man of belief”, the representative of “the disciple”; however, in *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, ET: *From Tradition to Gospel* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1934), p. 216, n. 2, he concedes that he is an historical figure who probably belongs to a priestly family in Jerusalem.

28. The Christian readers would obviously readily identify with a group labelled “his own”.
29. So also SCHNACKENBURG, “Herkunft,” *art. cit.*: “There is no possibility that this is an historical scene in the strict sense”.
30. There is a growing trend to regard the references to the Beloved Disciple as an insertion of the redactor. See H. THYEN, *Tradition und Glaube: Festschrift für K. G. Kuhn*, (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1971), p. 343, n. 2 where he refers to H.-P. Otto’s unpublished dissertation *Funktion und Bedeutung des Lieblingsjünger im Johannes-Evangelium*. Otto thinks that all the references to the Beloved Disciple are interpolations of the author of chapter 21, the redactor of the Fourth Gospel.
31. See BROWN, *John*, p. 574.
32. SCHNACKENBURG, “Herkunft,” the Beloved Disciple is thus “presented to the readers as the disciple closest to Jesus, as his confidant”; BARRETT, *John*, *op. cit.*, p. 372: “. . . the specially favoured disciple is represented as standing in the same relationship as Christ to the Father”; LORENZEN, *op. cit.*, takes exception to this formulation by Barrett, only a *similar* relationship is meant and one may not speak of it as the *same* (p. 83f.).
33. It is possible that Peter could not ask out loud because the meal was modelled on that of either the Essene or Qumran community. At such meals one may only speak in due order—IQS 6:10. See esp. K. G. KUHN, “The Lord’s Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Harper, 1969), p. 69.

This incident has several strange features. Besides the difficulty of why Peter did not ask Jesus directly who the betrayer was, there is the problem that once the identity of the traitor is revealed to the Beloved Disciple it is not relayed to Peter. Indeed, v. 28 says that "no one" at the table knew why Jesus told Judas to do what he had to do immediately, when in v. 26 Jesus does reveal to the Beloved Disciple that Judas is the betrayer.<sup>34</sup>

It can hardly be cogently maintained that the purpose of the pericope is to represent the Beloved Disciple as the "mediator" between Peter and the disciples.<sup>35</sup> This is simply not true to the text. Nothing is mediated to Peter! Peter is mentioned only once in the pericope in v. 24. Certainly in this pericope nothing of significance is said about the relation of Peter to the Beloved Disciple.

What then is the point of the pericope? In Matthew Jesus tells Judas himself that he is the betrayer; in the Fourth Gospel the secret is imparted to the Beloved Disciple. It is here that the point of the pericope is located. The whole scene specially introduces the "disciple whom Jesus loved", by which designation we are to understand him as having a special knowledge of, and relationship to, Jesus. This point is then illustrated in a simple story: The Beloved Disciple alone at the Last Supper knew of the identity of the betrayer. He was the special confidant of Jesus.

The next pericope in which the Beloved Disciple is explicitly mentioned is 19:25-27. The text of 19:26-27 reads:

Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν τὴν μετέρα καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα, λέγει τῇ μητρὶ γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου. εἰτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ: ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου. καὶ ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια.

Two preliminary points are worth making. First, Peter does not figure in this incident but rather Mary the mother of Jesus. Secondly, the passage hardly squares with the Synoptic tradition that Jesus' disciples deserted him after his arrest, a tradition which the Fourth Gospel does preserve: "The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone . . ." (16:32). The Evangelist records the Beloved Disciple as being present at the Last Supper, and so this should apply to him as well. However, one has to be wary of concluding that this, too, is an "ideal" scene, especially in view of 19:35 which can hardly refer to anyone but the Beloved Disciple under the cross, and the wording of which strongly suggests that he was there as an eyewitness.<sup>36</sup>

The questions to be considered are: (1) How are we to understand the figures of Mary and the Beloved Disciple here? (2) What is the essential thrust of the whole pericope?

34. It is true that Jesus does not specifically *name* Judas to the Beloved Disciple, but to assume that the Beloved Disciple did not understand the reply of Jesus (v. 26) is to assume that he was rather dim-witted, which hardly squares with the general picture we are given of him.

35. As does Kragerud, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

36. SCHNACKENBURG, "Der Jünger," *art. cit.*, p. 109.

Bultmann<sup>37</sup> interprets Mary as symbolic of Jewish Christianity and the Beloved Disciple as representative of Gentile Christianity. E. Meyer<sup>38</sup> sees the Beloved Disciple as replacing the unbelieving brothers of Jesus (7:3) and Jewish Christianity as being replaced by Gentile Christianity. But these suggestions are hardly true to the text. Dauer<sup>39</sup> does not think that the emphasis in this pericope falls on Mary but on the Beloved Disciple. However, he does see the presence of the women as evoking one of the Evangelist's main themes—the revealer is presented as the crisis of the world, calling forth unbelief and belief (represented by the soldiers—vss. 23-24—and the women—v.25—respectively). This suggestion has been criticised by Brown.<sup>40</sup>

We must look elsewhere for a plausible explanation of Mary's presence in the pericope. We begin with the text itself. In our examination of "the whole" we saw how scene four (19:1-3) was the centrepiece of Act two (18:28-19:16). Similarly here, this scene is the centrepiece of Act three (19:17-37). Its theological significance lies in its thematic conjunction with the Cana scene (2:1-11) through the term *gyne* derived from Genesis 3:15,<sup>41</sup> where Satan is crushed by the seed of the woman. Mary is representative of the woman, the woman who is mother of the faithful, for it is of the faithful that the Beloved Disciple is representative.

Dauer has pointed out the similarity of *γυναίκα, ἰδεὶς ὁ υἱὸς σου ἰδεὶς ἡ μήτηρ σου* to an adoption formula,<sup>42</sup> and sees an emphasis on the disciple taking over the obligation of Mary as a *grown-up* son.<sup>43</sup> There is much in this insight. In the light of it, what can we say about the response that the Evangelist wished to evoke from the readership in this pericope? The Evangelist is inviting his readership to identify with the Beloved Disciple, the disciple who was commissioned by the dying Jesus to be a witness and propagator of the new salvific dispensation, born under the shadow of the cross. The death of Jesus gives life to the Church.

The last pericope (apart from the postscript) in which the Beloved Disciple is explicitly named is 20:2-10. The scene presents some traditio-historical problems. Vss. 20:1-2 speak of Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb, finding the stone rolled away, and then rushing to Peter and the Beloved Disciple with the story. The two disciples then run to the tomb. The Beloved Disciple arrives first, but does not enter. Peter arrives and enters. Then the Beloved Disciple enters, and he "saw

37. BULTMANN, *John*, *op. cit.*, p. 673.

38. "Sinn und Tendenz der Schlusszene am Kreuz im Johannesevangelium (Joh 19, 25-27)", *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* (1924), 157-162.

39. A. DAUER, "Das Wort des Gekreuzigten an seine Mutter und 'den Jünger, den er liebte'", *BZ* 11 (1967) 222-239 & 12 (1968) 80-93.

40. BROWN, *John*, *op. cit.*, p. 904.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 925: "The episode at the foot of the cross has these details in common with the Cana scene: the two scenes are the only places in the Gospel that the mother of Jesus appears; in each she is addressed as 'Woman'; at Cana her intervention is rejected on the grounds that Jesus' hour had not yet come, but here we are in the context of Jesus' hour . . . In becoming the mother of the Beloved Disciple (the Christian), Mary is symbolically evocative of Lady Zion who, after the birth pangs, brings forth a new people in joy (John xvi 21; Isa xlix 20-22, liv 1, lxvi 7-11) . . ."

42. *Art. cit.*, p. 81.

43. *Ibid.*

and believed". V. 11 then takes up the second episode (see above) with Mary standing at the tomb. It seems at first glance as though the whole story of the two disciples is an interpolation.<sup>44</sup>

However, the studies of Hartmann<sup>45</sup> and Benoit<sup>46</sup> suggest that this conclusion is too hasty, and that here we are not dealing with a story freely composed and inserted by the Evangelist. It seems as though Luke knew of a tradition of Peter visiting the grave, and that this tradition is linked with the tradition of the Fourth Gospel. What does seem probable is the Evangelist inserted the Beloved Disciple into the story.<sup>47</sup>

For the purposes of our inquiry we must pose two questions: (1) In what sense did the Evangelist wish us to see the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple? (2) What is the significance of the whole pericope?

Here, as in 13:21-30, it must be noted that Peter and the Beloved Disciple are not placed in opposition. It is stated that the Beloved Disciple "saw and believed"; this is not explicitly stated of Peter. But:

Clearly, it is presupposed that Peter before him was likewise brought to faith through the sight of the empty grave; for if the writer had meant otherwise, and if the two disciples were set over against each other with respect to their πιστεύσαι, it would have had to be expressly stated that Peter did not believe.<sup>48</sup>

Bultmann sees the relation of the two disciples as the key to the interpretation of the scene. The race to the grave illustrates how each achieves precedence over the other. Thus:

. . . the meaning manifestly then is this: the first community of believers arises out of Jewish Christianity, and the Gentile Christians attain to faith only after them. But this does not signify any precedence of the former over the latter . . .<sup>49</sup>

We agree that the relation of the Beloved Disciple to Peter is the key to interpretation here. Plainly, it is not one of rivalry; in this Bultmann is also correct. The narrative is constructed in such a way that each can claim precedence over the other. But we cannot go as far as Bultmann and identify the Beloved Disciple with Gentile Christianity and Peter with Jewish Christianity. It is evident that the Johannine Church is meant to identify with the Beloved Disciple. The key to the problem of interpretation is to determine in what sense the Johannine readership would understand the representation of Peter.

There can be little doubt that Peter was a figure of great importance in early Christianity. There is a very strong tradition that he is a witness to the Resurrec-

44. So e.g., J. WELLHAUSEN, *Das Evangelium Johannis* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1908).

45. G. HARTMANN, "Die Vorlage der Osterberichte in Joh. 20," *ZNW* 55 (1964) 197-220.

46. P. BENOIT, "Marie-Madeleine et les disciples au tombeau selon Joh. 20, 1-18," in *Judentum, Urchristentum & Kirche: Festschrift für J. Jeremias*, (Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1960), pp. 141-152.

47. SCHNACKENBURG, "Der Jünger," *art. cit.*, 102-103; Lorenzen, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-37.

48. BULTMANN, *John*, *op. cit.*, p. 684.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 685.

tion (Lk. 24:34; I Cor. 15:5; cf. Mk. 16:7). He is known as an apostle (Mt. 10:12; Acts 1:13) and is recognized as the leader and spokesman of the disciples (Mt. 16:16-19; Mk. 8:27-29; cf.: Mk. 3:16, 9:2; Lk. 5:3-11, 22:31). The first chapters of Acts record him as being leader of the Jerusalem church in the early days,<sup>50</sup> and he is an authority in Corinth (I Cor. 1:12, 22) and Galatia (where his apostleship seems to have been contrasted favourably with Paul's). Moreover, there is the strongest evidence that he was an important authority in Syria, Antioch and Rome. (The Apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, the *Kerygmata Petrou* and the Gospel of Matthew probably originated in Syria<sup>51</sup> and there is a tradition that he was bishop of Antioch<sup>52</sup> and Rome.<sup>53</sup>)

The Fourth Gospel itself retains the tradition of the prominence of Peter in early Christianity (cf. 1:42; 6:68, and, of course, he is the first witness to the Resurrection—20:6-7). In the light of these observations, how is the figure of Peter to be understood in the Fourth Gospel? It seems justified to see him not as a representative of Jewish Christianity, but in a wider context: he is representative of the *Gesamtkirche*.<sup>54</sup> That is, Peter represents the whole Church, while the Beloved Disciple is representative of the local Johannine *Einzelkirche*.<sup>55</sup>

What, then, of significance is being said in this pericope? Simply this: The Johannine *Einzelkirche* (the Beloved Disciple) has an equal claim to that of the *Gesamtkirche* (Peter). Its faith and belief are just as authentic, indeed go hand in hand with that of the *Gesamtkirche*. The two disciples run to the grave together; one reaches the tomb first, but the other enters first. There is no attempt to denigrate Peter; rather the emphasis falls on the fact that the Beloved Disciple believed. It is not so much that the importance of Peter is played down;<sup>56</sup> rather the attempt is to elevate the importance of the Beloved Disciple. The whole thrust of the pericope seems to be to show that just as Peter and the Beloved Disciple share the same faith experience, so the faith of the Johannine *Einzelkirche* can be correlated with that of the *Gesamtkirche*.

The Beloved Disciple is also explicitly mentioned in the postscript (21:7 and 21:20). Although added by an editor, the references are instructive in confirming

50. He initiates the electing of the successor of Judas (Acts 1:15-22); he speaks on the day of Pentecost (2:14-41); he is the first Apostle to perform a miracle in the name of Jesus (3:1-10); he is the spokesman before the Sanhedrin (4:1-21); he is who pronounced judgement on Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). However, it is true that James appears to take over Peter's position in Jerusalem at an early date—quite possibly after Peter accepts the principle of a Gentile mission by admitting Cornelius to the Church (10:1-11, 18).

51. Peter is, of course, a key figure in Matthew—G. BORNKAMM, 'The Authority to 'Bind' and 'Loose' in Matthew's Gospel: The Problem of Sources in Matthew's Gospel', *Perspective II* (1970), 48: "... the congregation which acts in Matthew 18:15-18 knows itself as founded on the teaching of Jesus as guaranteed through Peter".

52. Cf. EUSEBIUS, *Ecc. Hist.*, III, p. 36.

53. This is, of course, a controverted issue. Ignatius (Rom 4:2) seems to suggest that Peter and Paul were persons of special authority in Rome, and Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, III, i, 2; III, iii, 1) explicitly says that they founded the Church in Rome. Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.*, II, xxv, 5-8) cites both Gaius of Rome and Dionysius of Corinth as substantiating this tradition.

54. We are using this term to denote the Christian communion of communities.

55. We are using this term to denote a particular local Christian community.

56. So LORENZEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 ff.

our conclusions. It seems unlikely that this editor misunderstood or intentionally falsified the Evangelist's picture of the Beloved Disciple.<sup>57</sup>

This observation is borne out by the text. 21:7 f. shows the same bias as 20:2-10. The Beloved Disciple recognizes Jesus first, but Peter reacts quickly and jumps into the sea in his desire to reach Jesus. Moreover, and this is of vital significance, 21:15-17 confers upon Peter a great honour. In response to Jesus' question "Do you love more than these?"<sup>58</sup> (i.e., the disciples, including the Beloved Disciple, who are present), Peter does not reply specifically to the question. He only asserts that he loves Jesus. This is important. The Johannine church, identifying with the Beloved Disciple, would probably see this in a positive manner. The sense is this: the authenticity of the faith of the Johannine community is acknowledged, in as much as Peter does *not* claim to love Jesus *more*; moreover, in the Fourth Gospel the theme of love is closely bound up with the concept of unity. Christians are one in love. There then follows the commission by Jesus to Peter as leader of the community.<sup>59</sup>

In v. 20 the Beloved Disciple is represented as doing what Peter has already been bidden to do: to follow Jesus. Again, it is difficult to see how this verse implies the Beloved Disciple's superiority to Peter; rather he is pictured as following Jesus as Peter is already doing. That is, he shares the same faith.

V. 21 contains a question about the Beloved Disciple by Peter: "Lord, what about this man?" To which Jesus replies, "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" "What is that to you?" can hardly be construed as a denigration of Peter, who after all had died a martyr's death (vss. 18-19). V. 23 then corrects an apparent misunderstanding: Jesus did not predict that the Beloved Disciple would live until the Parousia.<sup>60</sup> Presumably this was now a problem because he had died. One cannot use this verse as evidence that he is thus John the son of Zebedee, around whom legends had grown to this effect because of his immense age, for the earliest Christian belief was that the Parousia would take place before the first *generation* of Christians disappeared (I Thess. 4:15 and I Cor. 15:51). In other words, it was a general belief not attached to specific persons. Thus the Beloved Disciple could be anyone of the first generation of Christians.

57. The point is a controverted one. There are many who maintain that ch. 21 is not a postscript (see BULTMANN, *John*, pp. 700-706 for a discussion of the problem). We, however, not only think that it is, but that it was probably added by someone who was familiar with the author's work and intentions and perhaps an acquaintance.

58. It is unlikely that *πλέον τούτων* is a gloss—see BULTMANN, *John*, p. 711, n. 4. The possibility that Jesus is referring to the fishing tackle and not the other disciples is most improbable—see Barrett, *John*, p. 486. The sense of the Greek is obviously "Do you love me more than these people love me"—see F. BLASS & A. DEBRUNNER, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 99, Para. 185(1).

59. BULTMANN, *John*, p. 713.

60. B. LINDARS, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 32, thinks that the point of the verse was to "stop speculation about the Beloved Disciple, which had arisen from the Gospel already completed".

V. 24 then appears specifically to identify the Beloved Disciple with the author of the Gospel. If we accept the general verdict of scholarship that this is not the case, we are left with three alternatives:

- (1) The identification was a "tactical ploy" by the author to bolster the importance of the work. The work would thus be pseudepigraphical.
- (2) The identification was a misunderstanding of the editor. This seems unlikely.<sup>61</sup>
- (3) There is a third more plausible possibility—*γράφας* is to be taken in its causative sense.<sup>62</sup> That is, "This is the disciple who caused these things to be written".<sup>63</sup>

In favour of this latter view is the fact that the causative is used elsewhere, for example 19:1.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, in 20:24b the emphasis falls on the *witness* of the disciple. We cannot agree with Bultmann that a definite circle is not meant by *οἰδαμεν*. He says, "For either the readers know the circle which is editing the Gospel, and then the appeal is superfluous; or they do not know it, and then it is meaningless".<sup>65</sup> The appeal is not superfluous if the attempt is to authenticate this community's standing in the *Gesamtkirche*.

This verse is important, for it shows the singular significance of the Beloved Disciple in the Johannine community as a witness of tradition. The truth of the Johannine Gospel depended on it.<sup>66</sup> Such an affirmation is also found in the Gospel proper in 19:35. The person who saw the blood and water gushing from Jesus' side is quite evidently the disciple who stood under the cross, i.e., the Beloved Disciple. Even from his different standpoint, Kragerud observes that this is the most explicit reference within the Gospel to the Beloved Disciple as Christ-witness.<sup>67</sup>

We are leaving out of our discussion the possibility that the Beloved Disciple is referred to in either 1:35 or 18:15ff.<sup>68</sup> There is thus one other question left to

61. This is, of course, a possibility, but as an explanation it should only be resorted to if there is no viable alternative.

62. So A. DAUER, *art. cit.*, p. 91.

63. It is sometimes maintained that "these things" refer only to the contents of chapter 21. Years ago T. ZAHN, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1897-1899), ET: *Introduction to the New Testament*, III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 237, made a point which is still valid: "If it was necessary to assure the readers that chap. 21 was written by the Beloved Disciple of Jesus, it was even more important to make clear to them who wrote chaps. i-xx".

64. BLASS-DEBRUNNER, *Grammar*, para. 155,7.

65. *John*, p. 718, n. 1.

66. DAUER, *art. cit.*, pp. 91 f.

67. *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

68. In 1:35-42 two disciples of John the Baptist follow Jesus. One of the two, Andrew, next brings Simon Peter (his brother) to Jesus. If the reading *πρῶτος* (1:41) be accepted, then the unnamed disciple would be one of a pair of brothers, i.e., James or John. However, the reading *πρῶτον* is probably to be preferred (so also Barrett, *John*, pp. 151 f.) and this reading does not allow such an inference. To assume that the reader is supposed to identify the Beloved Disciple with the unnamed disciple is entirely unwarranted by the text (so also Lorenzen, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-46). In the other pericope (18:15-17), "another disciple", known to the High Priest, brings Peter into the

consider before we proceed to a conclusion about the significance of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel. That is the question of the anonymity of the figure. We have maintained that he is an historical figure with paradigmatic significance. But if he is historical, why is he not named? There have been various proposed resolutions to this problem.<sup>69</sup> Of these, Roloff's solution seems the most plausible.<sup>70</sup> He compares the Beloved Disciple to the Teacher of Righteousness who also is not named, yet who was of great significance in the community. Lorenzen has appropriated this insight:

The parallels (of the Teacher of Righteousness) to the Beloved Disciple are obvious. Whereas the Teacher understands himself to have an intimate relationship to God, the Beloved Disciple stands in an intimate relationship to the revealer of God. As a result of this intimate relationship both are exegetes and interpreters of God and Jesus respectively. Where the Teacher grounds his authority in the words of the prophets, the Beloved Disciple depends on the way of Jesus; both distinguish themselves in that they are both initiated into the divine secret which they then communicate to the community. Both are crucial personalities in their communities and thus so well known that they need not even be mentioned by name.<sup>71</sup>

Our conclusion is that we do not know who the disciple is, and that the Evangelist makes no attempt to tell us. What we can say is that the Evangelist regarded him as an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly existence and that he was one of the disciples, though not necessarily one of the Twelve. It is quite possible that he was a Jerusalem disciple,<sup>72</sup> but beyond that we cannot go.

In conclusion, what can we say about the figure of the Beloved Disciple for our question? How does this figure function in the redaction? There is no doubt that he is an important authenticator and witness of tradition—Roloff,<sup>73</sup> Dauer,<sup>74</sup> and Lorenzen<sup>75</sup> all draw this conclusion in their studies. He witnesses to those

---

High Priest's courtyard. The fact that this disciple is not named and is associated with Peter has led many to speculate that he is the Beloved Disciple. But again, this is unwarranted by the text, which simply does not support the identification.

69. For example, W. SANDAY, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 f., "The Beloved Disciple had a special reason for not wishing to protrude his personality. He was conscious of a great privilege, of a privilege that would single him out for all time among the children of men. He could not resist the temptation to speak of this privilege. The impulse of affection responding to affection prompted him to claim it. But the consciousness that he was doing so, and the reaction of modesty led him at the same time to suppress, what a vulgar egotism might have accentuated, the lower plane of his own individuality. The son of Zebedee (if it was he) desired to be merged and lost in the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' ". Such tortuous psychologizing explanations are neither convincing nor appealing.
70. J. ROLOFF, "Der johanneische 'Lieblingsjünger' und der Lehrer der Gerechtigkeit", *NTS* 15 (1968), 129-151.
71. *Op. cit.*, p. 105 (the translation is my own).
72. So SCHNACKENBURG, "Der Jünger," *art. cit.*, 112-113.
73. ROLOFF, *art. cit.*, 114: the significance of the Beloved Disciple lies in his "Zeugenfunktion, die auf seiner besonderen Kenntnis von Jesu Weg und Werk beruht".
74. DAUER, *art. cit.*, 92: The Beloved Disciple is the "Traditionsträger für den Evangelisten."
75. LORENZEN, *op. cit.*, p. 108: "The Evangelist projects this person back into the history of Jesus in order to emphasize against docetic extremists the unity of the earthly Jesus with the risen Lord, to demonstrate the reality and meaning of the passion and resurrection of Jesus, and at the same time to emphasize the independence of the Johannine theology". (Translation my own).



things most important in the Christian faith—the death and resurrection of Jesus (this is evidenced by his *strategic placement* in the redaction). His association with Peter is not to be seen as rivalry. The readership identifies *with* the Beloved Disciple but *not against* Peter. Rather the association is a further effort on the part of the Evangelist to legitimate the theology of the Johannine community.

Such a conclusion—if generally correct—has far-reaching implications for any discussion of “orthodoxy” and “heresy” in John. The author of the Gospel is claiming through the figure of the Beloved Disciple to stand both theologically and historically within the Christian fellowship. The Beloved Disciple was the confidant of Jesus, whom the Lord recognized as understanding him well. The theology of the Johannine community is dependent upon this same person; it is only through him that the Evangelist can claim that his work coheres with the truth of Divine Revelation. The author of the Fourth Gospel is, in short, claiming to be orthodox. Such an explicit claim must be carefully considered in any subsequent debate not only on John in particular, but also on the wider question of orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity.

---

Moreover, as he stood as mediator between the risen Lord and his community, he was therefore theologically a criterium for correct belief and *Gemeindefrommigkeit* (109).